

Mind Reading and Cognitive Distortion in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*

Jane Austen'in İkna Romanında Zihin Okuma ve Bilişsel Çarpıtma

Karam NAYEBPOUR

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ağrı İbrahim Çeçen University, Department of English Language and Literature

knayebpour@gmail.com

ORCID Number | ORCID Numarası: 0000-0001-8533-6555

Rakiye ÖZDAL

Res. Assist., Osmaniye Korkut Ata University, Department of English Language and Literature,

rakiye.ozdal@gmail.com

ORCID Number | ORCID Numarası: 0000-0001-5589-3852

Abstract

Mind reading is an important aspect of narrative in Jane Austen's fiction. Austen presents mind reading as the most effective element in the construction and development of her narrative plot in *Persuasion*. She mainly shows how mind reading can derive from thinking biases and bring about significant misunderstandings. By focusing on the central character Anne Elliot's desire to read her ex-fiancé's mental states in different situations, Austen explores the impact of mind reading quality and capacity on their relationship. Offered by the narrator Lisa Zunshine, mind reading refers to our ability to attribute or ascribe mental states to ourselves and to other people. Relying on Zunshine's terminology and considering her elaboration on the three main steps of mind reading, this paper has two main goals. Firstly, the essay analyses the way(s) Anne Elliot's mind reading capacity is presented in terms of body language, performance, and embodied transparencies. Secondly, the paper examines the reliability state of Anne's mind readings, as well as the effect of her cognitive distortions.

Key words: *Cognitive Narratology, Mind Reading, Cognitive Distortion, Persuasion, Jane Austen*

Öz

Zihin okuma Jane Austen'in romanlarında önemli bir hikâye anlatma unsurudur. Austen, *İkna*'daki olay örgüsünün gelişimi ve oluşumunda zihin okumayı en etkili unsur olarak sunar. Çoğu zaman Austen zihin okumanın, düşünme önyargılarından nasıl kaynaklanabildiğini ve yanlış anlaşılmalara nasıl sebebiyet verdiğini gösterir. Baş kahraman Anne Elliot'ın, eski nişanlısının farklı durumlarda zihnini okuma isteğinden yola çıkarak, Austen zihin okumanın ilişkileri üzerindeki nitelikli ve güçlü etkilerini keşfeder. Anlatıbilimci Lisa Zunshine tarafından ortaya çıkarılan zihin okuma, zihinsel durumları kendimize ve başka insanlara bağlama ya da atfetme yeteneğimiz olarak adlandırılır. Zunshine'ın üç ana kategoride analiz ettiği zihin okuma teorisi göz önünde bulundurularak, bu makalenin iki amacı bulunmaktadır. İlk olarak, Anne Elliot'un zihin okuma yeteneği vücut dili, sergilenmiş davranışlar ve istenmeden meydana çıkmış düşünceler açısından incelenecektir. İkinci olarak ise Anne'in zihin okumasının güvenilirliği kadar onun bilişsel çarpıtmalarının etkileri de sorgulanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Bilişsel Anlatıbilim, Zihin Okuma, Bilişsel Çarpıtma, İkna, Jane Austen*

Introduction

Of the novelists who played a significant role in the development of the English novel, Jane Austen (1775-1817) is one of the most popular. "The novel," in Michael Alexander's words, "reached perfection with Jane Austen"¹. With her originality in plot and innovation in characterization, Austen contributed considerably to the development of narrative techniques in the English novel. According to F. R. Leavis, "in her indebtedness to others, [Austen] provides an exceptionally illuminating study of the nature of originality, and she exemplifies beautifully the relations of 'the individual talent' to tradition. [. . .] She

¹ Alexander 2000, 241.

creates delightful characters”². The main source of Austen’s originality is generally ascribed to her artistic skill in reordering ordinary life experiences in her fictional worlds. As a result, she “is often thought of as a novelist working primarily from the empiricist standpoint of an experientially constructed subject”³. In the critic Lord David Cecil’s words, chaotic life finds order in art. In other words, Austen evokes order that is “a convincing picture of life,” satisfying “the rival claims of life and art”⁴.

*Persuasion*⁵ is one of Jane Austen’s posthumous novels in which the characters’ traits, as observed by Virginia Woolf, are revealed through their “marvelous little speeches”⁶. In addition to the importance of the characters’ speeches, presentation of their consciousness is a main narrative aspect in *Persuasion*. Compared to that of the eponymous character in Austen’s *Emma*, “Anne Elliot’s consciousness is sufficient, [. . .] for most of the needs of the novel which she dominates”⁷. In *Persuasion*, “Austen turns to biological and innate aspects of mind and character in an unusually deft manner”⁸. The novel presents the process through which Anne makes her evaluations and judgments of the other characters based on her own perceptions and thoughts. This process is narrated by focusing on the operation of her mind in critical situations. In Karah L. Smith’s words, since the novel “associates emotion with specific organs and physiological reactions, Anne is able to read these physical responses and attribute states of mind as their cause, thus relying on her proficiency in Theory of Mind”⁹.

The narrative plot in *Persuasion* primarily concentrates on its central character Anne Elliot’s mind reading activities. After eight years of separation, Anne, still unmarried at the age of twenty-seven, is reunited with her ex-fiancé, Captain Frederick Wentworth. Through closely observing his behaviour, she tries to understand his real thoughts and feelings toward her. In other words, she tries to read his mind. Accordingly, Frederick’s apparent indifference and “studied politeness”¹⁰ leads Anne to assume that, unlike her, he has forgotten their former mutual romantic feelings. Hence, she tries to suppress her own active romantic feelings toward him possibly to avoid causing herself embarrassment. Although she notices his indifference to her transforms into a careful attention from time to time, she fails to persuade herself to change her perspective on what seems to her as the unstable and unrealistic nature of Frederick’s mental state. In other words, despite her observation of the incongruences in his behaviour, she never questions the correctness of her own mind readings. However, when he finally declares his true feelings for her in a proposal letter, she confesses her mistakes in reading his mind and at the same time begins reconstructing Frederick’s mind.

The main narrative concern in *Persuasion* is the analysis of the quality and impact of Anne Elliot’s mind reading. She consistently endeavours to understand Captain Wentworth’s thoughts and feelings. Anne is represented as trying to understand and interpret the other characters’, especially Captain Wentworth’s, body language. *Persuasion* is a narrative of reunion, focusing on the revival process of a past feeling. Eight years prior to the time of narration, Anne’s sister and father, together with their neighbour, Lady Russell, persuaded Anne to end her engagement with Frederick as they did not belong to equal classes. After their breakup, Frederick joins the navy, and eight years later, he returns as Captain Wentworth and once more becomes a close member of Anne’s social circle. Coincident with their return and because of some financial struggle, the Elliots move to Bath after finding a tenant for their house. Their tenant, Admiral Croft, is Frederick’s brother-in-law. Realizing the tenant’s relationship with her

² Leavis 2011, 15.

³ Richardson 2002, 142.

⁴ Cecil qtd in Leavis 2011, 18.

⁵ Austen 1818.

⁶ Woolf qtd. in Booth 1983,54.

⁷ Booth 1983, 251.

⁸ Richardson 2002, 142.

⁹ Smith 2017.

¹⁰ Austen 2004, 62.

long-lost beloved, Anne begins to question her past decision. In their subsequent encounters, Captain Wentworth pretends to be indifferent towards her and behaves as if nothing had happened between them. He does not talk to her if it is not necessary, spending his time mostly with the Musgrove girls. Meanwhile, while he assumes that she is a snooty woman who desires to marry for the sake of wealth and appearances, his outward behaviour persuades Anne that he will never forgive her for what she did to him. The more they spend time together, the more Anne becomes determined to read his body language with the hope of recognizing his true thoughts and feelings.

Throughout their interaction, while Anne cannot be sure about their possible reunion mainly because of his seemingly cold demeanour, Captain Wentworth is finally able to perceive Anne's true thoughts and feelings about him. She rightly appears to him as a humble, considerate, and reasonable beloved. When he follows the Elliots to Bath, he feels jealous of the interaction between Anne and Mr. Elliot, who is Anne's cousin and desires to marry her. Realizing his misreading of her intentions, Anne, who does not want to marry her cousin, indirectly reveals her true feelings about Captain Wentworth in her conversation with his close friend, Captain Harvill. Having learned about Anne's true thoughts through eavesdropping, Frederick writes an unexpected letter to her, and confessing his already suppressed love for her, he proposes to her. By doing so, he indirectly corrects Anne's cognitive distortions or thinking errors. Finally, she accepts his proposal and her father and Lady Russell approve of their marriage.

Lisa Zunshine's Theory of Mind Reading

The nature of Anne's and Frederick's interaction in *Persuasion* can be analysed by what in cognitive approaches to narrative is referred to as Theory of Mind (ToM) or mind reading. Human beings acquire the skill of mind reading throughout their lives. Mind reading is considered a basic human quality. Since people attribute mental states to each other in their ordinary interactions, this skill enables them to understand art. The cognitive narratologist Lisa Zunshine, who conducted the most recent research on mind reading in literary studies, defines the term as an "approximate guessing and imperfect interpretation, most of it taking place below the radar of our consciousness"¹¹. As Zunshine argues, mind reading refers to an involuntary process of assuming the thoughts, desires, or intentions behind a person's body language. This means that our consciousness works on its own when it comes to reading others' minds. Mind reading is a natural tendency in our behaviour as we sometimes uncontrollably find ourselves attempting to read strangers' minds¹². However, since it is practically impossible to see people's exact thoughts, desires, or intentions by observing their body language, mind reading can change into distortion or what Zunshine calls mind misreading: "Given how many of our attributions and interpretations of thoughts and feelings are wrong or only approximately correct, they might as well call it mind misreading"¹³.

Human beings learn to read body language at an early stage of their lives by listening to stories in which the characters express emotions through actions, such as smiling when they are happy or crying when they are sad. In adulthood, however, mind reading becomes more complicated because different cultural codes shape our body language, which can reveal our mental states¹⁴. Mind reading is an ongoing cognitive activity since it never ends in certainty and is always prone to misreading. Zunshine explains the process of mind reading by dividing it into four interconnected stages:

¹¹ Zunshine 2012, xi.

¹² Zunshine 2006, 6.

¹³ Zunshine 2012, 2.

¹⁴ Zunshine 2012, 6-7.

First, we *assume* that there must be a mental state behind an observable behaviour [. . .] Second, even though we know that there must be a mental state behind a behavior, we don't really know what that state is. [. . .] Third, even though we can't really know what other people are thinking, we conduct our daily lives on the assumption that we do, more or less. [. . .] Fourth, because we go around knowing that there must be a mental state behind a behavior, and because we don't really know what that state is, even as we act as if we know, cultural representations exploit this precarious state of knowing and not knowing.¹⁵

Our assumptions about other people's mental states, even when we are certain about them, mostly derive from our cultural backgrounds and codes. Thus, although true mind reading cannot happen, the quality of our mind reading can improve through our experiences. In Zunshine's words, "The more we look for the 'true' mind in the body, the less we can hope to find, yet every screen, every stage, every page offers us new ways of looking"¹⁶. Zunshine, however, claims that we can partly read other people's minds through following their body language. Since we are aware of other people's efforts to read our minds by depending on our body language, we modify our behaviours, or perform, to censor our real thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, our real mental states can also be revealed to others by our embodied transparencies.

Our reception, evaluation, and understanding of literature as an art rely on our cognitive abilities. The represented events and realities in fictional worlds are the imitated versions of those in the real world. Therefore, as Amy Watkin in her review of Zunshine's *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and The Novel* states from Zunshine's perspective, "Even while we are aware that characters are fictional, we use our 'mind reading' capabilities while reading literature in order to explain nuances of gesture, movement, and intonation"¹⁷. To allow the reader to use their mind reading capabilities, the author should present the characters' body language within an appropriate context. Accordingly, the readers' level of mind reading depends on the degree an author intentionally reveals the characters' mental states. Perceiving the implications of the other bodies plays a significant role in our mind readings. We pay critical attention to others' facial expressions, bodily movements, and appearances¹⁸. For instance, a character's shaking body and chattering teeth may imply a frightened mental state or may simply be the physical indicators of being cold. Thus, in narrative texts, we should pay attention to the contextual descriptions of such behaviors in order to understand the underlying mental states presented through them.

According to Zunshine, "our theory-of-mind adaptations do not distinguish between the mental states of real people and fictional characters"¹⁹. In a similar way to our daily readings of other people's body language, our interpretation of fictional characters partly relies on our assumptions of their mental states suggested by their body language. Zunshine claims that the represented mind reading opportunities in fiction feed our "Theory of Mind" and gives us a "social" pleasure by using the two types of fictional mental states: "expressed propositionally" and "inferred from observable body language"²⁰. Hence, we make our assumptions about the fictional characters' mental states based on either their directly presented or described mental states or the hinted thoughts and feelings revealed through their described body language.

¹⁵ Zunshine 2012, 17-19.

¹⁶ Zunshine 2012, 19.

¹⁷ Watkin 2007, 142.

¹⁸ Zunshine 2012, 13.

¹⁹ Zunshine 2011, 353.

²⁰ Zunshine 2011, 353.

Whether we “perform” intentionally or not, our body language affects our assumptions. According to Zunshine, “we can’t help treating observable behaviour as a highly valuable source of information [. . .] Because we read intentions into bodies throughout our evolution as a social species”²¹. Although we inevitably try to read others’ minds, we know that there is no certainty in any mind reading. Likewise, while the protagonists/narrators in any given narrative text read minds, they either point out the possibility of a different mental state or have a strong trust in their own mind reading. In the latter case, generally a significant disappointment, shock, or surprise happens when the desired mental state is revealed.

In a similar way to our tendency to read other people’s minds based on their body languages, we tend to align our behaviours to other people’s expectations. By being able to read others’ minds, we become aware of being read by them. This knowledge plays a crucial role in both our and the fictional characters’ communications. Therefore, body language, whether consciously or not, can be used or “performed” to shape others’ opinions and perceptions of us²². In experiencing fiction, we have the opportunity to witness the whole process: whether the protagonist “performs” or not; if there is “performing,” whether it is conscious or intentional; and whether the characters’ actions represent their thoughts, feelings, and desires. As long as the authors allow, fiction provides an opportunity to observe how the characters’ awareness of others’ behaviour, or performances, can cause uncertainty and doubt in their mind readings. Similar to the fictional characters, our mind reading is also affected and shaped by different factors throughout the narration. During our reading experience, the possible twists, unexpected consequences, and limited information can mislead our interpretation of the characters and their behaviours. Therefore, while we might miss some mental states in our first reading, we usually identify them in our rereading(s). Sometimes, we might not know the meaning of certain body language until the end of narrative when, after true meanings are revealed, we begin realizing the implications of that body language²³. Although some mental states can confuse us for a while as they are potentials for misreading, they are significant determiners in revealing the basic elements of any prose fiction.

There are some moments in any narrative in which characters, consciously or unconsciously, reveal their real mental states. Referring to such revealing moments as embodied transparency, Zunshine describes the term as “putting protagonists in situations in which their bodies spontaneously reveal their true feelings, sometimes against their wills”²⁴. In an anthropomorphic manner, characters frequently hide their true thoughts, feelings, desires, and intentions rather than sharing them with others. Therefore, a glimpse of transparency can reveal these character’s real mental states at a given time. Although passages including the embodied transparencies are the main sources of meaning and pleasure in our reading, they can sometimes enhance our misreading of the characters’ real mental states. Authors, according to Zunshine, construct moments of transparency within prose fiction using three rules:

The first rule is *contrasts*: an author has to build up a context in which the character’s transparency stands out sharply against the relative lack of transparency of other characters or of the same character a moment ago or a moment after. The second rule is *transience*: to be believable, instances of transparency must be brief. The third rule is *restraint*: more often than not, characters struggle to conceal their feelings and by doing so become transparent. (emphasis original)²⁵

²¹ Zunshine 2012, 14.

²² Zunshine 2012, 14.

²³ Zunshine 2012, 42.

²⁴ Zunshine 2008, 72.

²⁵ Zunshine 2012, 30.

In her studies on mind reading, Zunshine has repeatedly referred to Jane Austen's novels as a rich source for her theories. The main reason for Zunshine's interest in Austen's works could be that "Austen's characters share many traits of actual people"²⁶. According to Zunshine, Austen constantly employs fictional mental states by either explaining her characters' thoughts and feelings or showing their body language²⁷. One main aspect of her characters is a strong tendency to read other minds. Most of the attempted mind readings, however, are merely misreadings or cognitive distortions. For example, there are many passages in Austen's *Emma* where the eponymous character realizes her mind misreading. She feels *wretched* when she discovers that Mr. Elton has always been intending to propose to her rather than to her close friend Harriet to whom Emma intended to direct his attention. As represented in the mode of free indirect discourse, Emma tries to understand what led her to misread Mr. Elton's mind. She concludes that his manners or behaviour were the source of her mind misreading:

How she could have been so deceived! He protested that he had never thought seriously of Harriet –never! She looked back as well as she could; but it was all confusion. She had taken up the idea, she supposed, and made every thing bend to it. His manners, however, must have been unmarked, wavering, dubious, or she could not have been so misled.²⁸

Although in "her relationships with the other characters," as Nayebpour highlights, Emma "goes through some serious miscalculations and misjudgements," they are "constructive for her character to develop"²⁹. A similar situation is at work in *Pride and Prejudice* in many scenes. For example, when Mr. Darcy proposes to Elizabeth for the first time, she refuses him for two reasons. On the one hand, she wants a marriage of love, and on the other hand, she incorrectly reads his mind about his opinion of class distinction. Not expecting such a reaction from Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy unwillingly reveals his feeling of anger. His embodied transparency is immediately registered by the keen Elizabeth, through his complexion: "Mr. Darcy, who was leaning against the mantelpiece with his eyes fixed on her face, seemed to catch her words with no less resentment than surprise. His complexion became pale with anger, and would not open his lips, till he believed himself to have attained it"³⁰. The situation in *Persuasion* is similar to that in *Emma*. Anne's cognitive distortions or thinking errors end in unrealistic thoughts.

The Complex Process of Mind Reading in *Persuasion*

Through Anne Elliot's mind reading efforts and her cognitive distortions, we can analyse the manner of her own mental functioning. We witness how her mind reading ability affects her relationship with her ex-fiancé. Anne desires to read Captain Wentworth's mind so that she might understand the main reason of his return after eight years of separation. Her mind reading efforts, however, sometimes end in misinterpretations and misreadings. Anne pays close attention to Wentworth's behaviour toward her. He appears to her as civil, unemotional, and even cold. Therefore, she assumes that he has already lost his love and interest in her.

Persuasion is narrated by a limited omniscient narrator. Throughout the novel, Anne's perspective is the dominant one. The narrator mostly focuses on the flow of her thoughts, perceptions, and feelings, which all reflect her mental functioning. Persuaded by her family and friends to end her engagement with Frederick, Anne has not been able to forget her former fiancé. With his return after eight years, the

²⁶ Nayebpour 2017, 129.

²⁷ Zunshine 2011, 353.

²⁸ Austen 2008, 106.

²⁹ Nayebpour 2017, 128.

³⁰ Austen 2003, 129.

unmarried Anne realizes she is still in love with him. However, relying on Frederick's cold and distant demeanours, she feels he has forgotten their former romantic relationship:

Whether former feelings were to be renewed, must be brought to the proof; former time must undoubtedly be brought to the recollection of each; they could not but be reverted to; the year of their engagement could not but be named by him, in the little narratives or descriptions which conversation called forth. His profession qualified him, his disposition led him, to talk; and 'That was in the year six;' 'That happened before I went to sea in the year six,' occurred in the course of the first evening they spent together: and though his voice did not falter, and though she had no reason to suppose his eye wandering towards her while he spoke, Anne felt the utter impossibility, from her knowledge of his mind, that he could be unvisited by remembrance any more than herself. There must be the same immediate association of thought, though she was very far from conceiving it to be of equal pain.³¹

When they first see each other at the Musgroves, Anne realizes Frederick chooses his words carefully whenever he refers to their broken engagement. She thinks that he does so in order to abstain from giving any hint to their former relationship. Since she thinks she knows his intentions, Anne concludes that it should be impossible for Frederick not to remember the experience he had with her. Through depending on his apparent indifference, Anne assumes that their suffering and pain could not be equal. Therefore, she makes a direct connection between Frederick's behaviour and his mental states. She assumes that his behaviour is the mirror of his mental state and can reveal to her his real intentions.

By eavesdropping on Captain Wentworth's and Louisa's conversation about the significance of decision-making and firmness in a (female) character, Anne becomes aware that Frederick is looking for a young and strong woman who cannot be persuaded by others, as she was, to marry. Anne feels that at the age of twenty-seven she knows exactly what he thinks about her as she has already been persuaded by others. Based on his tribute to Louisa Musgrove, she believes that he has just found his ideal woman. Thinking that she knows how Frederick sees her and that he does not share her feelings, Anne feels embarrassed to love someone who does not love her back. Although she notices small indications he is interested in her, such as a direct look or question from time to time, his cold and distant behaviour forces her to keep her true feelings private rather than sharing them with others. When she is overwhelmed by her emotions, she tries to modify her behaviour to not betray her true feelings to him. At such moments, Anne behaves in ways that do not reflect her true mental state.

Although Anne usually feels sure about her mind readings, Captain Wentworth's behaviour gives her opposing signals, making her to question the correctness of her own mind readings. The unconscious expression of his interest in her in different situations makes his mind transparent to her. However, Anne cannot completely and correctly read Frederick's mind or know his mental state until he intentionally reveals it by writing a letter to propose to her for the second time. Because of this letter, she realizes her own gross mistakes in mind reading. Most of the time, her mind readings have actually been mind misreadings.

Anne's curiosity about Frederick's real thoughts about and feelings for her makes keeping him under her close attention unavoidable. She tries to understand Frederick's mind through decoding his body language. Moreover, since they are both aware of being read by each other, they behave as to not reveal their true mental states. Despite their controlled performances, there are moments in which some of their true feelings and thoughts are unexpectedly and unwantedly expressed.

³¹ Austen 2004, 55.

Body Language

Body language, or non-verbal behaviour, is an important source of knowledge and plays a significant role in people's interpersonal communications. To some extent, any mind reading activity employs body language as in many occasions people try to read each other's thoughts by relying on their gestures and postures. Body language is a potentially unreliable source of mind reading since it can be affected by the mind reader's background and personal interests. However, our minds work unconsciously when it comes to reading others' minds to understand or decode their real thoughts. Anne Elliot cannot control her own desire for mind reading. She unconsciously tends to read Frederick's mind so that she might find his true mental state toward her. She observes his body language meticulously to discover clues that he is still interested in her. For example, she pays attention to the times he makes eye contact with her. During their short trip to Lyme, when a gentleman pays particular attention to Anne, she feels confident enough to observe whether Frederick shows any reaction to this situation. Catching his glance, Anne assumes his brief action reflects his true mental state: "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'"³². In such situations, Anne imagines herself coming out of her own mind and looking at herself from the perspective of the other: Frederick. In other words, she not only seems to read Frederick's mental state by following his body language, but she also imagines the way she appears to him.

Eye contact provides an opportunity for Anne to read Frederick's thoughts and feelings. She makes assumptions depending on the form of their eye contact. While she reads his glances as a sign of interest, she defines his half glance and half-averted eyes as a sign of love. During their conversation at a concert, she reads his mind and reaches a conclusion only based on his expression and half-averted eyes: "He must love her"³³. However, Anne's interpretations are much too subjective. While the existence of eye contact equates to Frederick's interest in her, lack of it implies the distance between them, as well as Frederick's coldness or indifference to her. After reading his mind and identifying his love by depending on his half-averted eyes, Anne changes her mind about his interest in her because, by relying on the lack of eye contact later, she thinks that he is withdrawn from her.

Anne also imposes her desired interpretation on Frederick's physical distance from her. While their physical closeness reveals his interest in her, a lack of closeness implies the opposite. For example, she feels disappointed at the concert when she realizes his distance has nothing to do with his interest in her. Instead, his cold behaviour is the result of his jealousy of Anne's cousin Mr. Elliot who is interested in her. Accordingly, for a short time, she admits her own mistake in incorrectly reading his mind. However, she returns to her previous perspective towards his distance at the following party:

Their last meeting had been most important in opening his feelings; she had delivered from it a delightful conviction; but she feared from his looks, that the same unfortunate persuasion, which had hastened him away from the concert room, still governed. He did not seem to want to be near enough for conversation.³⁴

Anne thinks that Frederick does not want to have (an open) conversation with her because he "seems" not to do so. Her desire to discover the truth propels her to rely on mind reading to find the true mental state behind Frederick's observable body language. In other words, mind reading helps her make Frederick's absent mind present to herself. However, the only source of validity for her efforts is

³² Austen 2004, 87.

³³ Austen 2004, 150.

³⁴ Austen 2004, 178.

Frederick himself because, through much of the narrative, no one other than him knows his true mental state or feeling toward her.

Performance

The knowledge of our ability to read others' minds and others' ability to read our minds makes us aware of our own behaviours. In situations in which we do not want our thoughts and feelings read by the others, we behave in ways that preserve our real mental states. At the beginning of the novel, when Anne and Frederick meet each other for the first time after eight years, they both behave in ways that hide their true thoughts and feelings about each other. Having seen Frederick's distance and cold demeanour in their first meeting, Anne tries to hide her true mental state through a modified behaviour. That is not an easy performance for her. When Frederick shows any interest and kindness toward her, Anne struggles to hide her true mental state because, in Frederick's new character, she identifies the qualities of his younger self with whom she had deeply fallen in love. However, when she passes through such a transient moment, she is embarrassed she is unable to forget about a past feeling. Therefore, in order to abstain from sharing, showing, or revealing what she considers her own unanswered romantic feelings, Anne moves through a false set of behaviours, which do not reflect her true mental state.

Similar to her performance, Frederick also tries to hide his true mental state from Anne as he thinks that if she loved him enough, she would not have been persuaded by others to end their relationship. Since he thinks she does not see him as equal to her or worth fighting for, he intentionally presents a cold and distant behaviour toward her to make her understand that it is she who has lost the opportunity of having him. When he finds her alone in the drawing room for the first time after eight years, he does not know how to behave and tries to put physical distance between them before regaining his composure. However, Anne becomes quite surprised when he saves her from Walter, Anne's naughty nephew. Unlike his usual indifference, Anne finds the sudden change in his behaviour as a sign of his caring and kindness for her and becomes shocked. However, she immediately changes her mind when, by avoiding hearing her thanks, Frederick shifts into his usual distant behaviour:

with the conviction soon forced on her by the noise he was studiously making with the child, that he meant to avoid hearing her thanks, and rather sought to testify that her conversation was the last of his wants, produced such a confusion of varying, but very painful agitation, as she could not recover from, till enabled by the entrance of Mary and the Miss Musgroves to make over her little patience to their cares, and leave the room. She could not stay..., till she had a little better arranged her own. She was ashamed of herself, quite ashamed of being so nervous, so overcome by such a trifle; but so it was; and it required a long application of solitude and reflection to recover her.³⁵

While after her disappointment Anne struggles to regain her composure, or modified behaviour, Frederick can immediately hide his true thoughts and feelings by focusing on Walter and behaving as a disinterested person in her presence. Anne and Frederick, therefore, consciously present a similar set of modified behaviours whenever they are in each other's company. They are careful not to reveal any interest in each other by censoring themselves or keeping their behaviours under control.

Although Frederick is cold and distant most of the time, Anne senses his curiosity and thoughts about her through overhearing his conversations with others. While eavesdropping on his and Louisa's conversation, Anne overhears how Frederick appears shocked when Louisa tells him the story of her brother's proposal to Anne rather than to her younger sister Mary and how she rejected him. During

³⁵ Austen 2004, 69.

another instance of eavesdropping, in Lyme after Louisa's accident, Anne also overhears how Frederick thinks highly of her when he says Anne is the most appropriate person to take care of ill Louisa: "If one stays to assist Mrs. Harville, I think it need to be only one. –Mrs. Charles Musgrove will, of course, wish to get back to her children; but, if Anne will stay, no one so proper, so capable as Anne!"³⁶. Before joining their company, she takes time to gain her self-control. Likewise, after her reappearance in the room, Frederick also recedes into his usual cold and distant behaviour by moving away.

Although they do not have a direct and open conversation with each other, Anne uses her conversations with others to send her messages to Frederick. However, when she feels herself under Frederick's gaze, she shifts into performing and tries to control her body language: "The careless expression was life to Anne, who saw that Captain Wentworth was all attention, looking and listening with his whole soul; and that the last words brought his enquiring eyes from Charles to herself"³⁷. Despite this evidence, Anne continues her performance. Being conscious he is listening to her words, she behaves as a confident woman who can give voice to her thoughts, despite privately feeling she lacks confidence.

Embodied Transparencies

No matter how much people try to hide their true thoughts and feelings, in some situations, they lose their control over their behaviours. Termed as embodied transparencies, these moments can shed light on the true feelings of people and characters. As true about Anne, registering a path of significant change in our object's, or analysand's, behaviour causes us to question the correctness of our previous perceptions through comparing them to our present, embodied transparent, ones. During their performances, Anne's and Frederick's body language betrays them, revealing their true mental states to each other.

The controlling perspective in *Persuasion* is Anne's perspective. Thus, Frederick's embodied transparencies, compared to those of Anne's, are presented more in the narrative. Believing that he has already lost his interest in her as a lover and now she is only an old friend from the past, she is not only surprised by Frederick's spontaneous revelations but also confused by their implications as to her mind reading ability. While at one moment Frederick seems to be interested in her, at other moments, he seems to ignore her by being cold and distant. In their second encounter at the Musgroves, Anne pays close attention to Frederick's body language while at the same time avoiding eye contact. She finds him determined to remain distant, choosing his words carefully and avoiding any reference to the year of their terminated engagement. Frederick becomes surprised when he learns that Anne prefers playing the piano to dancing in the hall. While playing, Anne overhears his questions about her, and when she finishes her performance, Frederick stands up to give her seat back to her. By relying on his previous cold and distant behaviour, she interprets his momentary politeness as a "studied politeness": "Anne did not wish for more of such looks and speeches. His cold politeness, his ceremonious grace, were worse than anything"³⁸. While Anne finds Frederick's indifference unbearable, he in fact intentionally reveals his true mental state. However, his changing behaviour seems confusing to her.

By eavesdropping on Captain Wentworth's and Louisa Musgrove's conversation, Anne not only learns he is curious about her, but also learns how he sees her: as someone who is not determined and strong enough to follow her own wishes. The fact that Frederick only reveals his thoughts and perceptions to Louisa shakes Anne's sense of self-control. Although no one other than herself knows that she has heard what Frederick told Louisa, she thinks that she needs some time to recover from the effect of Frederick's

³⁶ Austen 2004, 95.

³⁷ Austen 2004, 180.

³⁸ Austen 2004, 62.

thoughts. She feels she needs time to curb her “agitation.” In other words, she tries to control her embodied transparency:

The sounds were retreating, and Anne distinguished no more. Her own emotions still kept her fixed. She had much to recover from, before she could move. The listener’s proverbial fate was not absolutely hers; she had heard no evil of herself, –but she had heard a great deal of very painful import. She saw how her own character was considered by Captain Wentworth; and there had been just that degree of feeling and curiosity about her in his manner, which must give her extreme agitation.³⁹

Captain Wentworth’s words about someone with courage do not actually refer directly to Anne. However, his astonishment at her reaction to another proposal, their shared history, and maybe even her own sense of guilt about their separation all make her assume that he does not think highly of her. The consequences of her eavesdropping are destructive to her feelings.

Despite her ongoing disappointment and misinterpretations, they have a good conversation at the concert at the end of which Anne assumes that Frederick is less cold and distant toward her. However, her cousin Mr. Elliot’s presence and his attempts to impose himself on her change the improving nature of Anne’s relationship with Frederick once more. Unexpectedly, she discovers that he has turned into his old self: cold and distant. When Frederick leaves the concert with a quick farewell by explaining that there is nothing worth his staying there, Anne internally interprets the unfavourable change of his mood:

Jealousy of Mr. Elliot! It was the only intelligible motive. Captain Wentworth jealous of her affection! Could she have believed it a week ago; three hours ago! For a moment the gratification was exquisite. But, alas! there were very different thoughts to succeed. How was such jealousy to be quieted? How was the truth to reach him? How, in all the peculiar disadvantages of their respective situations, would he ever learn of her real sentiments? It was misery to think of Mr. Elliot's attentions. –Their evil was incalculable.⁴⁰

Anne ascribes Frederick’s odd and inappropriate behaviour to his jealousy. She thinks that he does not want to share her with anyone. The enlightening moment of Frederick’s embodied transparency evoked by Mr. Elliot’s unexpected closeness to her allows Anne to correctly read his mind. She does so by focusing on his contrasting behaviours. As a consequence, she rightly knows that his departure is caused by his jealousy of Mr. Elliot.

Anne Elliot’s Cognitive Distortions

Offered by the Psychiatrist Aaron T. Beck, cognitive distortions are defined as “the result of processing information in ways that predictably resulted in identifiable errors in thinking”⁴¹. Identifying true mental states by merely relying on (modified) behaviour is not always an easy process. This practice in many cases ends in cognitive distortion or thinking errors. The complexities of the mind reading process are presented in *Persuasion* through Anne. While censuring her own intentions, she tries to read Captain Wentworth’s mind through carefully observing his behaviour. Frederick’s embodied transparencies enable her to occasionally register some part of his mental states. However, the narrative mainly shows how Anne’s obsessive engagement with mind reading mostly ends in cognitive distortion as she misinterprets most of the situations related with the other characters. Thus, as a result of her occasional mind misreading and through reading her own mind, Anne undergoes emotional suffering when she

³⁹ Austen 2004, 75.

⁴⁰ Austen 2004, 154.

⁴¹ Yurica and DiTomasso 2004, 117.

finds herself unable to read or understand the other minds: “But just now she could think only of Captain Wentworth. She could not understand his present feelings, whether he were really suffering much from disappointment or not; and till that point were settled, she could not be quite herself”⁴².

Despite her efforts, Anne fails to identify Frederick’s true thoughts and feelings about herself. Instead, she simulates an imaginary mind based on her highly perspectival wishes and perceptions and ascribes it to Frederick. The constructed mind, however, is far from being a realistic one. When toward the end of narrative, she receives a letter from Frederick, she begins to reconstruct his mind. Known as Frederick’s second proposal, the letter provides a chance for Anne to question the reliability and validity of her own perceptions about the operation of Frederick’s mind:

‘I can listen no longer in silence. I must speak to you [. . .] Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman, that his love has an earlier death. I have loved none but you. Unjust I may have been, weak and resentful I have been, but never inconstant. You alone have brought me to Bath. For you alone, I think and plan. Have you not seen this? Can you fail to have understood my wishes? I had not waited even these ten days, could I have read your feelings, as I think you must have penetrated mine. I can hardly write. I am every instant hearing something which overpowers me.’⁴³

Before receiving this letter from Frederick, Anne thinks that Frederick would marry someone with courage and youth, probably with one of the Musgroves. She reveals some of her thoughts about Frederick in her conversation with his close friend Captain Harville. She implies that she knows Captain Wentworth has already forgotten her while she is still in love with him. Having learned what Anne truly thinks and feels about him by eavesdropping on her conversation with Captain Harville, Captain Wentworth becomes determined to write a proposal letter to her and declare his consistent love. By doing so, he forces Anne to see her readings have, in fact, been misreadings. Frederick’s eye-opening letter presents his mind to her directly. Having read his letter, her perspective, both toward him and toward her own mind reading ability, changes fundamentally. Frederick intentionally sends this letter to her to correct her grave mistake. Therefore, this letter serves as evidence for at least three significant points in the narrative: Captain Wentworth has never been indifferent to Anne, he has had no intention of marrying someone else, and she is not a skilled mind reader as the main part of her mind readings proved to be incorrect.

Conclusion

Jane Austen’s narratives mostly represent the mental functioning of the central characters. One of the advantages of Austen’s approach to character and characterization is to illustrate the rift between how characters simulate the outside world based on their imaginative minds and what the reality is. The focus of narrative in *Persuasion* is Anne Elliot’s highly subjective interpretation of her ex-fiancé Captain Wentworth’s thoughts and feelings. Throughout the narrative, she is represented as trying to learn whether he still loves her as she does him. The lack of any open relationship, or proper communication, between the two encouraged them to decode each other’s mental states based on their body language. As demonstrated in this essay, the cognitive narratologist Lisa Zunshine’s approach to fictional minds provides us with some useful terminologies to analyse the situation between Anne and Frederick. To understand what they think and how they feel about each other, both Anne and Captain Wentworth pay close attention to each other’s body language. The narrative, however, mostly focuses on Anne’s situation. While closely analysing Frederick’s behaviour, she tries to hide her own intentions by

⁴² Austen 2004, 144.

⁴³ Austen 2004, 191.

modifying her behaviour because she is aware of being read by her object of analysis: Frederick. Since both are aware of their minds being read by the other, they inevitably modify their behaviours in order to control the other's mind reading ability. However, they lose their highly protected self-control, or the control of their performances, in some situations. In other words, they unconsciously reveal their true mental states to each other through their embodied transparencies. Although Wentworth's embodied transparencies do not immediately change Anne's mind about the validity of her own assumptions, they gradually raise questions in her mind about the reliability of her own perceptions about Captain Wentworth's mind. His embodied transparencies provoke basic confusions about Anne's mind readings since they are in conflict with her own perceptions about him. The fact that his opposing behaviours continuously change challenges the validity of her own mind readings in time. However, through her modified behaviour, she manages to suppress the impact of Frederick's embodied transparencies on her own mind and behaviour for a while. The revealing moments, or embodied transparencies, become meaningful only when the character's true mental state is clearly presented. In other words, by taking Anne's perspective throughout the narrative, we rarely question the reliability of her mind readings. However, when Captain Wentworth directly reveals his thoughts and feelings, we begin to reconstruct their minds, and in a similar way, Anne begins reconstructing Captain Wentworth's mind. Anne's mind reading capacity is, therefore, controlled by Captain Wentworth. Without his allowance, she rarely succeeds in her desire to learn the truth. Anne finally discovers that Captain Wentworth's indifferent behaviour towards her has only been a performance. In other words, his letter makes her aware of her own cognitive distortions or thinking errors as she finally accepts most of her mind readings have in fact been mind misreadings.

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