

# “Who Is He to Speak of My Sorrow?”

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**Abstract** This article suggests that comparative literature scholars may benefit from the awareness that different communities around the world subscribe to different models of mind and that works of fiction can thus be fruitfully analyzed in relation to those local ideologies of mind. Taking as her starting point the “opacity of mind” doctrine, found in the South Pacific and Melanesia, the author compares cultural practices originating in communities in which people think but do not talk publicly about others’ internal states, to those originating in communities in which people both think and talk about them, indeed, in which public speculation about other people’s intentions is (mostly) rewarded. While the immediate analysis centers on a very specific and limited set of case studies from English, Chinese, and Russian novels and Bosavi performance genres, the author’s larger goal is to begin to articulate opportunities and challenges of using research in theory of mind for the comparative study of literature.

**Keywords** opacity doctrine, theory of mind, novel, performance genres, comparative literature

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

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For more than a decade now, anthropologists have been talking about the “opacity of mind” model, “found in varying forms throughout the South Pacific and Melanesia”; its “most striking feature is the insistent refusal to infer what other people are thinking unless they verbalize their intentions” (Luhmann 2011: 7). One reason that this model has received much attention is that it complicates our understanding of *theory of mind*, aka *mind reading*, which are metaphorical terms used by cognitive scientists to describe our evolved cognitive capacity for understanding people in terms of their mental states. (For a brief illustration of how “mind reading” works, “when you see someone running, you don’t just see a physical body in acceleration — you see the intention or the desire to catch the bus or win a medal; when you see a hand reaching for an object, you don’t just see a trajectory through space — you see the goal of getting that object” [Astuti 2012]). By studying ideologies of mind among Bosavi, Korowai, Ku Waru, Yap, and other peoples in Melanesia and Micronesia, who subscribe, in one form or another, to the opacity doctrine, researchers have become aware of how different models of mind may influence both daily social interactions and cultural representations. In what follows, I build on their insights to compare practices of addressing the reader/listener in English, Chinese, and Russian novels and in Bosavi performance genres. While my focus here is on a very specific and limited set of case studies, my larger goal is to begin to articulate opportunities and challenges of using research in theory of mind for a comparative study of literature.

### Mind Reading Made Strange

When anthropologists and ethnographers had initially confronted what they would come to call the opacity model, they wondered if it meant that, in some Melanesian societies, “it is impossible or at least extremely difficult to know what other people think or feel” (Robbins and Rumsey 2008: 407–8). This prompted a conversation about methods used for studying mind reading in concrete cultural contexts, as well as an inquiry into the ethical implications of claiming to know, or not to know, other people’s minds. Speaking of the former, Rita Astuti (2012) has pointed out that mind reading exists on several different levels: “[One] is the level of conscious reflection about the mind, what we might call *Explicit Theories* of Theory of Mind, and the other is the level of mind reading that happens largely outside conscious reflection and probably conscious control. Ethnographic methods are of course well suited to record the former, while experimental methods are best suited to tap into the latter.”

It is deeply unfortunate that the very terms that we use to describe the phenomenon in question, *mind reading* and *theory of mind*, seem to foreground

one level (that of conscious reflection) and obscure the other. Most of our daily mind reading does not proceed as a series of self-conscious propositions, such as “I believe that X intends to do Y.” Instead, it depends on embodied, “immediate, intuitive, pre-rational understanding of another’s actions” (Duranti 2008: 492). Such understanding, moreover, given the messy pragmatics of our daily communication, often translates into misimagining and misinterpreting one’s own and others’ mental states.

If we focus on the level of mind reading that happens outside conscious reflection and control, we discover that, while Bosavi or Korowai may avoid explicit references to other people’s minds, they may actually be “more attentive to [their] intentions as a result” (Luhrmann 2011: 11). This means that ethnographers, used to ways in which some forms of explicit mind reading are performed in their own communities, should be careful not to substitute their informants’ assertions “of how the world should be” for a description of what they may actually “find in the world” (11).

For instance, struck by such a recurrent feature of the opacity model as the taboo against direct eye contact, ethnographers may assume that Bosavi do not pay attention to one another’s facial expressions. They will thus miss the fact that Bosavi keep their foreheads clear of hair or head dresses, letting others “read” their emotions off of their foreheads (Bambi Schieffelin pers. comm., March 1, 2019). Similarly, as Steven Feld (pers. comm., March 1, 2019) explains, while Bosavi may not impute thoughts to others, “there is an impeccable and ubiquitous attendance to what others feel, and that is coded at every linguistic level, but particularly marked by lexical items, emphatics, prosody, and a range of gestural, stance, facial expressive, and other paralinguistic markers coordinated with everyday speech.”

Consider, too, that we have on our hands yet another case of far-from-perfect terminology. The term *opacity of mind* implies a sharp break between cultures that subscribe to that model and cultures that do not (including, presumably, our own). In reality, both types of cultures function on “a not-very-rigid continuum” (Feld, pers. comm.) of opacity/transparency, accumulating clusters of mind-reading patterns that respond to specific social challenges. For instance, given that Bosavi live in close physical proximity to one another, the inside of a person’s head is often the only private space available. The pragmatics of protecting that space from others are expressed through specific features of verbal etiquette and contribute to the maintenance of psychological well-being (Bambi Schieffelin, pers. comm., March 1, 2019). We find similar features geared toward “allowing people their psychological privacy” in other communities whose members live in close quarters yet which are not necessarily viewed as conforming to the opacity model (Caldwell-Harris, Kronrod, and Yang 2013: 53).

Hence, another way of viewing that model shifts the focus from the psychology and epistemology of mind reading to its ethical significance. As Webb Keane (2016: 127) explains, the taboo on attributing intentions to others often reflects the local notion of personal integrity and inviolability, according to which the loss of ability to keep one's feelings hidden is considered shameful:

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

Let us stay with these two important aspects of mind reading brought into a sharper perspective by the observation of Melanesian mind-reading theories and verbal practices: first, the difference between explicit and implicit attribution of mental states, and second, ethical repercussions of these attributions. What happens if we factor them into cognitive literary criticism, specifically into the investigation, which has now been going on for almost two decades, of the role of mind reading in the production and perception of culture? To give you some idea of the “defamiliarizing” effect of doing so, consider this example.

If communities indeed elaborate some mind-reading practices and suppress others, we may view a variety of cultural institutions as implicated in this project. Thus, college courses in literature train students to discuss mental states of others. “Others” in this case range from fictional characters, authors, and literary critics, dead or alive, to one's classmates. Surprising yet plausible attributions of complex intentions earn good grades.

This process, however, is not explicitly framed as an exercise in mind reading. In fact, it may even be accompanied by disavowals of interest in intentionality. If an ethnographer approaches a college professor and asks her how knowable she considers various minds under consideration in her course, she may offer some version of the opacity of mind model. She may say, for instance, that we have no way of knowing what the author was thinking, that characters don't exist so can't really have thoughts and feelings, and so on. We may think of her response as underwritten by healthy epistemological skepticism, by the ethics of personal integrity and inviolability, or more broadly, by what Alessandro Duranti (2008: 493) characterizes as a “pan-

human . . . defense strategy against the accountability that comes with making claims about what others think or want." Nevertheless, neither classroom nor scholarly conversation about literature can happen without elaborating just these kinds of claims.

To give the screw yet another turn, recall that advocates of the humanities often say, and with good reason, that taking such courses develops students' critical thinking and thus contributes to the well-being of the community at large. Yet what is "critical thinking" but the heightened capacity for convincingly questioning and elaborating people's intentions? If in *Bosavi* the statement of one's intentions is taken as precluding further public speculation about them (what goes on in private is, of course, a different matter), in our culture such a statement often serves as an invitation for open scrutiny. Clever public contestations of other people's mental states are applauded. An ability to construct a convincing argument about what a politician or a writer must have really meant—in direct opposition to what he or she claimed to have meant, or even may have sincerely believed to have meant—is a prized skill. As Elinor Ochs (1984: 335) observes,

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

So, while on some level we may find compelling the idea of personal opacity and integrity (and feel relieved by the lack of accountability that comes with it), many of our cultural institutions, indeed, those that we may think of as fundamental to a liberal democracy, seem to be geared toward rendering people transparent, or temporarily legible, by various eloquent others.

Interplay between explicit and implicit mind reading is thus a dynamic cultural process, not least so because its ethical values remain contested and, as it were, improvised. Let us keep this productive instability—this sense of the ongoing cognitive-cultural bricolage—in mind as we take a closer look at mind reading in fiction.

### **Fiction as a Special Domain of Mind Reading**

While we constantly attribute mental states to others, we do not really know what these others are thinking—indeed, they may not know it either (Hogan

2017: 232)—yet when it comes to people who don't exist, we are often on surer ground. Some authors outright tell us what goes through the minds of their characters, while others let us make reasonable inferences (Zunshine 2006, 2012). In this respect, fiction is a special domain of mind reading, both in our own culture and in cultures whose ideologies of mind differ from ours.

Thus, in Bosavi, “prior to missionization,” which began in the 1970s, there “were no equivalencies in . . . metalinguistic and metapragmatic repertoire for reporting the private thoughts or internal states of others” (Schieffelin 2007: 150), unless one repeated verbatim what other people said about their feelings and used source tags—an “evidential marker”—to clearly indicate the original speakers (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984: 294). There was, however, one important exception, a linguistic context that allowed reporting others' hidden thoughts: the “traditional story genres that recounted Bosavi origins, or the bawdy adventures or social dilemmas of fictitious cultural heroes, schlemiels, and animals” (Schieffelin 2007: 150). Such narratives appeared to “mobilize different linguistic resources as part of the register of the genre.” For instance, a “morpheme -mosoba [‘I wonder’], relatively rare in spontaneous speech, was found more in stories” (as in, “o:no gasa a:no: eno: ko:lo: go:mosoba?” “that dog I wonder if it was his” [Schieffelin 2019]) In addition, storytellers disclaimed “responsibility for the information” about the characters' mental states by reminding listeners that this was all “in the story” (Bambi Schieffelin, pers. comm., January 23, 2019).

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

[While] in-principle assertions of the opacity doctrine are common [among Ku Waru], they are contradicted by other things that people do, including the stories that they tell. For example, in a genre of sung tales of courtship that are composed and performed in the region, at the point in the story when the lovers first meet, there is often a passage such as this: ‘Right then he wanted to marry her. / That’s what the man was thinking. / And she thought the same about him. / The minds of both, you see / Were working completely as one.’ In other words, given the lovers’ strong mutual attraction, it is possible for each of them to know what is in the other’s mind because it is the same as what is in his or her own. (Rumsey 2011: 222)

While making bold assertions about inner states of characters may be a special prerogative of fiction in a wide variety of cultures, I focus here on one subgenre of such assertions, involving private thoughts of readers/listeners. We may have come to experience authors’ descriptions of their readers’ mental states as somewhat formulaic, that is, as having little to do with actual people reading the story. It thus may take a comparativist perspective—that is, an inquiry into how such references function in cultures that subscribe to the

opacity doctrine, in contrast to cultures that do not — to start to appreciate the peculiar mind-reading dynamic created by such moments.

### Ungrateful, Sarcastic, Shameless, and Complacent Readers

I start with Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749). The passage below centers on Thwackum, a private teacher hired by wealthy landowner Allworthy to educate two boys in his care. By this point in the novel, readers are aware that Thwackum is a woefully inadequate pedagogue and wonder why Allworthy remains oblivious to it. The narrator then reminds us that the only reason we see Thwackum as he truly is, is that the narrator took pains to share with us certain information, and that had he not done so, we wouldn't have been any wiser than Allworthy:

Thwackum, at his first arrival, was extremely agreeable to Allworthy; and indeed he perfectly answered the character which had been given of him. Upon longer acquaintance, however, and more intimate conversation, this worthy man saw infirmities in the tutor, which he could have wished him to have been without; though as those seemed greatly overbalanced by his good qualities, they did not incline Mr Allworthy to part with him: nor would they indeed have justified such a proceeding; for the reader is greatly mistaken, if he conceives that Thwackum appeared to Mr Allworthy in the same light as he doth to him in this history; and he is as much deceived, if he imagines that the most intimate acquaintance which he himself could have had with that divine, would have informed him of those things which we, from our inspiration, are enabled to open and discover. *Of readers who, from such conceits as these, condemn the wisdom or penetration of Mr Allworthy, I shall not scruple to say, that they make a very bad and ungrateful use of that knowledge which we have communicated to them.* (Fielding [1749] 1996: 117)

Fielding here anticipates insights from contemporary cognitive psychology by intuitively exploiting the egocentricity biases of his readers (Riva et al. 2016). That is, he expects that they would assume that if something is obvious to *them* (in this case, that Thwackum should not be working with children), then it should be obvious to the person immediately involved in the situation, in this case, Allworthy. Having thus first led his readers into this cognitive trap — having constructed, in effect, a particular mental state for them — Fielding then has good reason to accuse them of being presumptuous and using badly the privileged knowledge that was communicated to them. Having expended no effort in finding out the truth (and why should they have? Wasn't that truth conveniently handed to them by the narrator?), readers now find themselves justly called out on their smug self-satisfaction.

Note that, in theater, disparity between what characters know and what audiences know is routine — we call it dramatic irony. But, then, in theater,

audiences are not often explicitly berated for feeling superior to characters. That is, their inner thoughts are not exposed, as it were, to public chastisement.

Should Fielding's readers feel angry for having their thoughts publicly described and judged? As a matter of fact, sometimes they do. In my experience of teaching *Tom Jones*, it takes quite a bit of work on the part of the instructor to convince undergraduates that the narrator, on this and other occasions, laughs with and not at them and that he is gently ironic rather than sarcastic. More experienced readers, such as graduate students and literary critics, may have learned not to take the narrator's mind-reading attacks personally. They postulate, for instance, the figure of the implied reader who serves as a protective barrier between themselves and the text. Thus we can say that it is the implied reader that Fielding's implied author is making fun of, while the thought processes of the real reader, a flesh and blood one holding the book, remain comfortably in the shadow. Or we can say (for the implied reader is an accommodating construct) that it is a hypothetical bad reader who looks down at Allworthy, while the smart implied reader, with whom we happily associate ourselves, knows better.

All said, it doesn't take too long before Fielding's epistemological attack loses its edge (again, especially for more experienced audiences) and assumes a harmless formulaic status as a whimsical convention associated with the novel.

My next example of the narrator's attributing a mental state—and not a flattering one—to his reader comes from *Eugene Onegin*, Alexander Pushkin's 1833 "novel in verse." By the 1830s Russian audiences were familiar with the works of Fielding, as well as those of Samuel Richardson, Laurence Sterne, Alain-René Lesage, and Pierre de Marivaux. This means that the conversation between the novel's narrator and his reader may have been already experienced as mediated by the conventions of the genre, which would further neutralize the narrator's presumptuous reading of his reader's thoughts.

In the first chapter of the novel, Eugene Onegin, a jaded young gentleman from St. Petersburg, comes into possession of a country estate left to him by his late uncle. Onegin is entertained by this new setting—"the coolness of the somber park, / the bubbling of the quiet brook"—for two days. By the third day he is as bored in the country as he was in the city. In this he is different from the first-person narrator, who uses this occasion not just to talk about his own love of "rural quiet" but also to poke fun at the reader for thinking that the author is surely using himself as the model for his hero:

Flowers, love, the country, idleness,  
ye fields! My soul is vowed to you.



I'm always glad to mark the difference  
 between Onegin and myself,  
 lest a sarcastic reader  
 or else some publisher  
 of complicated calumny,  
 collating here my traits,  
 repeat thereafter shamelessly  
 that I have scrawled my portrait  
 like Byron, the poet of pride  
 — as if we were no longer able  
 to write long poems  
 on any other subject than ourselves! (Pushkin [1833] 1975: 119)

Pushkin's reader is not an attractive figure. He is quick to accuse the author of lacking imagination and to mock him for that (*насмешливый читатель*) when, in fact, it is he, the reader, who turns out to be unimaginative. (I use the masculine pronoun because, in the original, Pushkin's reader is gendered male, though, of course, there is a long tradition in Russian belles-letters to say “he” while meaning “everyone.”) This reader seems to suffer from a version of egocentricity bias that we have seen already at play in Fielding. He assumes, impudently, shamelessly (*безбожно*), that authors of long poems can write only about themselves, which of course shows that *he* is the one with a limited view and would have a hard time sustaining a perspective different from his own.

How are we, real-life readers, supposed to respond to this insinuation or — let us call a spade a spade — to this unprovoked attack? On one hand, we can't help admitting that there is some truth to it, for yes, it takes less of a cognitive effort on our part to identify the protagonist of a long narrative poem with its author than it takes to keep the two apart. On the other hand, perhaps we were not doing it at this particular point; that is, we weren't necessarily saying to ourselves, aha! Pushkin is surely describing himself when he is portraying Onegin as bored by the rural life! But now that the accusation has been leveled against us and we sort of see its general justice, should we just acquiesce to it meekly or should we get angry at the narrator?

Here the protective barriers go up again. We remind ourselves that this is a literary convention — didn't Fielding's narrator tease his readers in a similar fashion? For all we know, Pushkin may be having a conversation with particularly well-read members of his audience about that very convention. Or, if this is not convincing enough, we can always bring in the implied reader and say, for instance, that the implied author is having a conversation with his smart readers about some other readers who are intellectually lazy and at

whose intellectual laziness we can comfortably laugh together with Pushkin. And so we regain our equanimity and retain a good relationship with the text.

My third example comes from David Hawkes's acclaimed translation of a classic Chinese novel, Cao Xueqin's *Dream of the Red Chamber*, aka *The Story of the Stone*, which was written in the 1750s and first published in 1791. I emphasize the English version of 1977 because the passage that I am about to discuss is not, strictly speaking, in any of the extant originals. As Fan Shengyu (2018: 38) points out, "Hawkes was at the same time a scholarly translator and a literary editor" who created his own base text not found in any one surviving manuscript. Moreover, he saw his goal as doing "the whole" of the novel while at the same time rendering it "enjoyable for the English reader, [so that] they can get some of the pleasure out of it that [he] got [himself]" (Minford 2012: 343). Knowing this, one can't help speculate that, because, just before embarking on his project, Hawkes "was reading and rereading many favorite works of classic English fiction" (343), the particular excerpt I am about to quote may have been directly influenced by Fielding's *Tom Jones*.

Here is how we are led to that possible Fieldingesque moment. In chapter 29, the novel's star-crossed lovers, a boy named Bao-yu and a girl named Dai-yu, are fighting again. The narrator first tells us what each of them is thinking and then observes that they themselves cannot read each other's minds. Below, I have condensed the young people's thoughts to make the long quote manageable:

What Bao-yu was actually thinking at this moment was something like this: "In my eyes and in my thoughts there is no one else but you. I can forgive the others for not knowing this, but surely you ought to realize?" . . . On her side Dai-yu's thoughts were somewhat as follows: "I know you must care for me a little bit, [but . . . how] is it, then, that when I do refer to [a token associated with Dai-yu's rival] you get so excited? It shows that it must be on your mind. You *pretend* to be upset in order to allay my suspicions." Meanwhile a quite different thought was running through Bao-yu's mind: "I would do anything—absolutely anything," he was thinking, "if only you would be nice to me. . . . It doesn't really matter whether you know what I feel for you or not . . ." At the same time Dai-yu was thinking: "Never mind me. Just be your own natural self. If you were all right, I should be all right too. All these maneuverings to try and anticipate my feelings don't bring us any closer together; they merely draw us farther apart." (Cao 1977: 85–86)

What happens immediately after that, in Hawkes's translation, seems to echo Fielding's reproach to his readers:

The percipient reader will no doubt observe that these two young people were already of one mind, but that the complicated procedures by which they sought to draw together were in fact having precisely the opposite effect. Complacent read-

er! Permit us to remind you that your correct understanding of the situation is due solely to the fact that we have been revealing to you the secret, innermost thoughts of those two young persons, which neither of them had so far ever felt able to express.

Let us now return from the contemplation of inner thoughts to the recording of outward appearances. (86–87)

While the original text certainly appeals to the reader (看官, 你道 . . .), it does not explicitly reproach that reader for complacency. Here is a manuscript version of these lines, followed by my bare-bones translation:

看官, 你道兩個人原是一個心, 如此看來卻都是多生了枝葉, 將那求近之心, 反弄成疏遠之意了。此皆他二人素昔所存私心, 難以備述。如今只說他們外面的形容 (Cao 2012, 2:90)

Reader, you see that these two people were originally of one mind/heart, so it seems that trying to get closer they move further apart. But it is difficult to describe their innermost thoughts, so we will only speak of their outward behavior.

Perhaps the reason that Hawkes felt the need to add the modifiers *percipient* and *complacent* was that, as Haiyan Lee (pers. comm., February 3, 2019) observes, “‘Reader’ is not an adequate translation for 看官 [*kàn guān*]. 官 [*guān*] being ‘official,’ the moniker humbles the narrator to the position of a servant who has the tough job of pleasing or amusing a person of privilege who is wont to take many good things for granted and not appreciate the hard work done by those around/below him.” Evoking his readers’ superciliousness, immediately after a page-long detailed description of his characters’ feelings—which, the narrator then hastens to add, are difficult to describe (難以備述)—may in fact come across as a tacit rebuke to those readers. Were it not for the narrator, the readers would have to content themselves with merely observing the characters’ outward behavior (外面的形容) and end up no wiser than the poor besotted Bao-yu and Dai-yu. Borrowing from Fielding, if that was indeed what he did, allowed Hawkes to make that rebuke explicit and thus convey to his English audiences some sense of the complex social dynamic implied by this passage.

The striking similarity between Fielding’s and Hawkes’s phrasing is thus almost certainly an artifact of the translation. But even so, the interpersonal dynamic involving the reader and the narrator, which underlies this phrasing in both novels, is still similar and rather peculiar. Chinese and English literary traditions developed independently from each other (Plaks 1978: 176), so let us not lose track of the fact that their respective pathbreaking novels, *Tom Jones* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*, both feature attacks on the reader, however

playful and even cloaked in the rhetoric of subservience, those attacks may appear.

To see what may be at stake in these attacks, and in our commitment to treating them as harmless literary conventions, let us turn to a culture associated with the opacity of mind model and less forgiving of intrusive mind reading by their bards.

### Opportunistic Mind Reading

Gisalo is a song-and-dance ceremony practiced by the Kaluli, that is, the people of Bosavi. (Note that, although I speak of it in the present tense, all descriptions of this performance genre refer to the period of the 1960s through the 1980s, for it is not clear if Gisalos still take place today.) It is performed by guests who dance and sing songs, accompanied by a chorus, which are designed to evoke strong feelings of nostalgia, sorrow, and loneliness in their hosts by naming specific locations that have profound personal meaning for them. The performance is considered successful if the hosts start weeping and then rush up to the singing dancer and burn his shoulders with a torch, to retaliate for making them so unhappy. The dancers are supposed to keep singing, undeterred by the repeated acts of burning. When the performance is over, they give their hosts little gifts to further recompense them for having made them cry. Afterward, the hosts feel obligated to treat their guests to an equally moving Gisalo, so they round up their own singers, compose a series of songs that they hope will get their former guests to cry, and journey to their longhouse.

Given the complexity of Gisalo songs, it is beyond the scope of this article to analyze any of them closely. Readers can find examples of such analysis in two classic studies, Edward Schieffelin's (1976) *The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers* and Feld's (1990) *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*. Here I discuss the intersubjective dynamic of Gisalo and suggest that a somewhat similar dynamic is at play in Cao's, Fielding's, and Pushkin's addresses to their readers and that we should not be in a hurry to ignore the sense of provocation intended by those addresses. To put it starkly, I suspect that, had these writers been born and come into their creative selves in Bosavi, they wouldn't have been averse to being rushed with a burning torch as a measure of their ability to get under their audience's skin.

While comparing performance genres and novels may seem like a stretch under any circumstances—and so much more when they hail from vastly different cultures—I believe that a cognitivist perspective provides us with a

unique vantage point for doing so. On the one hand, it focuses our attention on their intentional appeal to their audiences’ emotions, or what Feld (1990: 178) calls their “meaningful, intentional coding of sentiments.” On the other hand, it foregrounds their difference, for it does matter that the Bosavi ideology of mind is distinct from that of Chinese and Europeans, in that it puts a higher value on the individuals’ capacity for keeping their thoughts and feelings to themselves (Schieffelin 2008). In other words, it is because these complex artifacts are unique products of their respective cultures—different as they are, both generically and formally—that their mind-reading dynamics become a promising object of comparativist inquiry.

In the rest of this section, I highlight three aspects of *Gisalo*, which are all familiar to students of the novel: its dialogism, its capacity to engage a wide-ranging audience, and its cultural status as an aesthetic object that invites critical analysis.

We start with the dialogic, reciprocal nature of *Gisalo*: its relentless “orientation toward the listener” (Bakhtin 1982: 280). An effective *Gisalo* cultivates what Edward Schieffelin (1976: 190) characterizes as “excruciating intimacy” between the dancers and their audience:

When [the names of places with which the hosts] most deeply associate themselves [are sung] at them in *Gisa*[1]o, they are thrown back into themselves upon all that those places mean to them. The grief evoked by the songs becomes in this way something of an intrusion. “When the dancer sings about *Alims*[c]k,” one informant said, “I am reminded of my dead wife, *Yano*, who planted pandanus and breadfruit there with me. He [the dancer] is saying, ‘Now you go alone to pick from the gardens you planted with your wife. Now there is only you.’ I feel, ‘Why do you sing about my gardens? Why do you say I am alone? What do you mean? *Kadaa!*’” (He plunges the torch.) Another informant said, “Who is he to speak of my sorrow? He doesn’t belong here!”

While we may find the idea of “the burning of the dancers” shocking and thus think of it as the focal point of the ceremony, *Kaluli* themselves do not experience it that way: “From the *Kaluli* point of view, the main object of *Gisa*[1]o is not the burning of the dancers. On the contrary, the point is for the dancers to make the hosts burst into tears. The hosts then burn the dancers in angry revenge for the suffering they have been made to feel. To the dancers and the chorus, this reflects rather well on their songs” (24).

Moreover, this “painful tension between grief, intimacy, and violence becomes visible when someone from the audience angrily thrusts the torch out on the dancer’s shoulder and then throws his arms around him, hugging him affectionately and wailing uncontrollably” (190). An emotional collab-

oration between performers and their audience is thus a key condition for a successful Gisalo:

The listeners' feelings and reactions are not merely a response to the performance; they are integral to its structure and significance. The dancing and singing by the performers and the weeping and burning by the audience stimulate and aggravate one another. If the [listeners] fail to respond to the songs, even enthusiastic performers soon lose interest, and the ceremony falls apart before the night is over. (197)

We now turn to what seems to be an obvious point of difference between Gisalo and the novel: the fact that Gisalo performers tailor their songs to the known personal histories of their hosts, while novelists face an anonymous audience. Upon closer look, this difference appears to be one of degree rather than of kind. For instance, during Cao's life, his novel circulated among his friends and relatives in manuscript, garnering impassioned marginalia. Based on these marginal comments, we know that the first readers "enjoyed their special relationship with the author" and were "pleased to have inside information about his intentions. . . . One commentator suspected that he was a model for Bao-yu," while another insisted that Cao delete certain offending passages (Huang 2012: 95). As to Fielding and Pushkin, both of them envisioned at least some specific readers even while wrapping their minds around the cognitively challenging concept of an anonymous mass market (a concept that still remains challenging today, as we know all too well, with the advent of the internet).

But then, Gisalo performers also have to contend with a broad range of listeners, frequently hoping rather than knowing for sure that their songs will hit their emotional marks. To quote Edward Schieffelin (1976: 183) again:

Sometimes a composer knows an area well and makes up his songs with a particular person in mind . . . , but it is also common to find that several different men have each contributed a few locality names when no single one of them knows the area well enough to compose a song alone. They may have no idea who is associated with those localities, but if there are people from these places present at the ceremony, the song will ferret them out and cause them to weep. . . . The references to localities are anonymous, like the figures of the dancers, and the people in the audience see different things in them, each [their] own particular memories and sorrows (or those of dear friends). For a given song, some in the audience pay little attention, and others listen raptly. To an observer, it seems as if each listener thinks the dancer sings only to [them]. Sitting half-hidden in the shadows at the sidelines of the dancing space, each seems to turn inward, lost in [their] own mood and thoughts.

Similarly, as Feld (1990: 150) observes: “The range of interpretation can be either very specific or very broad, depending on the knowledge of the listener. . . . [The] poetic intention involves the axiom that evocative imagery is produced when there is a simultaneity of just enough new information and just enough potential for multiple interpretation.”

In other words, Gisalo songs must pack enough potential emotional relevance to appeal to *any* Bosavi listener. This brings us to our last point of comparison, which concerns the status of Gisalo songs as “obvious[ ] aesthetic objects” (128). Far from being a spontaneous outpouring of sentiments, those songs are spectacles “intended to communicate to [their] audience the skill, care, and affective sensibilities of the composer and performer” (255). This means, first all of all, that they are carefully rehearsed: “Considerable time is usually spent by dancers and chorus, practicing together to develop just the right atmosphere and sonority. [It may take] as long as three weeks in practicing Gisa[l]o songs, and as little as five days” (Schieffelin 1976: 167).

In addition to being rehearsed, Gisalos are staged to ensure the maximum contrast between them and the everyday activities. For instance, a complicated system of pre-Gisalo rituals prevents audiences from engaging with dancers, so as not to render them too familiar and hence destroy their mystique (Schieffelin 1976: 168). As Feld (1990: 178) puts it, “Staging is the method by which the audience is prepared to treat musical form and style as a meaningful, intentional coding of sentiments.”

Finally, Gisalo songs remain the subject of conversation for many days after a performance, as appreciative hosts keep uncovering “subtlety and complexity in the [guests’] interweaving of geography and personal allusion” (Schieffelin 1976: 184). A tape recording of a Gisalo made by an ethnographer may prompt a “discussion session,” which would last “for hours” and in which “several older Kaluli men” would listen “repeatedly to the same song, . . . recalling the history of its performance, who had wept and why, and how the song [reached its emotional climax].” They would enjoy “abstractly analyzing the tape and constantly [mix] verbal and gestural forms of evaluation and response” (Feld 1990: 223).

A successful Gisalo song is thus simultaneously beloved, resented (hence the burning), and appreciated as an aesthetic object, and each of these responses is bound up with the audience’s response to the performer’s intentions. As a cultural artifact, it is thus a paradigmatically intrusive act of mind reading. It starts by proclaiming a listener’s sorrow to the world and then keeps building on the listener’s awareness of this violation—a violation that may arguably feel more poignant in a culture that values people’s ability to keep their feelings to themselves—all the while experimenting with “linguistic forms [and] sound symbolism” (Feld 1990: 215–16). The daily “impec-

cable and ubiquitous attendance to what others feel”—expressed in locally appropriate forms—is “dramatically heightened as one moves into registers of speech and song where textual construction and performative choices overdetermine options for knowing what others feel and how they mean to provoke response” (Feld, pers. comm., March 1, 2019).

Here is why I insist on considering Gisalo songs side by side with novels whose narrators directly address their readers. I believe that both express a peculiar mind-reading dynamic associated with literature. Not all readers may agree that the term *literature*, strongly bound with written discourse, can be applied to oral performance genres, yet I see no deep reason not to use it in reference to “sung poetic arts” (Feld 1990), such as Gisalo. We have already observed that, in Papua New Guinea as well as in England, China, and Russia, storytelling constitutes a social domain in which audiences are allowed to assume that they have direct access to other people’s—that is, to fictional characters’—mental states. (“Right then he wanted to marry her. / That’s what the man was thinking. / And she thought the same about him.”) But then, it seems that literature will not stay contained within these safe mind-reading boundaries. It keeps reaching out to the real world. If you allow me this bit of personification, I will say that literature keeps opportunistically grabbing at real minds, such as those of Gisalo listeners and novel readers, to see how knowable and transparent it can render these minds. (Transparent *momentarily*—for instance, during the actual moment of weeping and burning—but also, sometimes, more long-term, for the listeners’ immediate emotional response may become an aesthetic object in its own right, as when the Kaluli go over the finer points of a recent Gisalo, discussing “who had wept and why” [Feld 1990: 223].)

Would I go as far as to call this opportunistic mind reading a fundamental feature of literature? Were I to do so, Haiyan Lee’s article in this volume would offer a useful starting point for theorizing this feature. As Lee points out, mind reading moves to the foreground of cultural representations in “commercial societies structured by stranger sociality, cosmopolitanism, and social mobility” (205), in which the challenge of figuring out intentions of people one has never met is part of daily routine. When it comes to literature, Lee suggests, the dynamic between the reader and the implied author/narrator—“insofar as the reader is an unknown quantity to the narrator”—resembles the dynamic “which obtains between strangers” (212). Recall that even in Bosavi, which one would not describe as structured by stranger sociality, Gisalo songs are expected to appeal to *any* listener, even as they target specific members of the audience.

As a potential encounter between strangers, a work of literature thus mobilizes mind-reading capacities of the author, which translates into higher



demands on the theory of mind of the reader, which may lead to the emergence of readers particularly appreciative of this kind of social stimulation, which may in turn prompt some authors to further ratchet up the intensity of the mind-reading effort that they expect from their readers. While it is not my goal here to explore in depth this arms-race view of the history of literature (I propose it mainly to show the rich interpretive potential of Lee’s “stranger sociality” argument), the larger point behind it—that literature may energetically reach into strangers’ minds—is worthy of attention, especially by those of us working at the intersection of literary studies and cognitive science.

### Models of Mind, Models of Comparativity

How do audiences respond to the opportunistic mind reading of their cultural artifacts? To some extent, those responses are mediated by specific ideologies of mind, including local models of mind. For instance, we may resent it when Fielding calls us out on our egocentricity (having just constructed that cognitive trap for us himself!), but in a culture that considers other people’s mental states fair game and generally rewards intrusive mind reading, our resentment may not get a lot of traction. And so we content ourselves by seeing Fielding’s attack as a generic convention or as an amusing jab directed at *some other* reader. We may also remind ourselves that this is all water under the literary-historical bridge: the presumptuous author has been dead for more than two hundred years, and the intended provocation had already hit its mark and is now harmless.

Would we respond the same way to a work that would put us on the mind-reading spot right now, without the protective layers of time and genre? I suspect not (Zunshine 2012: 113), which means that audiences’ reactions to such provocations, both here and in Bosavi, are not reducible to what we consider those cultures’ respective models of mind. Think of such programs as mock documentaries and reality shows. On the one hand, they build on our culture’s free-for-all attitude toward other people’s inner states. Yet, on the other, they derive some of their affective punch from the viewers’ embarrassment and discomfort as they watch the show participants during the moments of their (presumed) emotional nakedness.

This is to say that, while different communities may assign different ethical values to their members’ ability to protect their inner states from prying others, the spectrum of individual responses to complex cultural artifacts that cultivate such prying is always wider than those ethical dominants seem to warrant.

What is in it for us—and by *us* I mean the intended audience of this article, which includes students of comparative literature and cognitive literary scho-

lars? To the best of my knowledge, the field of comparative literature is not yet aware that different communities around the world may subscribe to different models of mind and that works of literature can thus be fruitfully analyzed in relation to those local models. In fact, let me take one step further back and say that mainstream comparative literature has hardly begun to acknowledge the role of theory of mind in literary production, much less the role of the diversity of the models of mind. This is what I advocate, then. Factoring in research on theory of mind—informed by both psychological and ethnographic/anthropological perspectives—opens up new venues of comparative literary analysis, especially if one is careful not to approach literature as merely reflecting local ideologies of mind reading.

As Bambi Schieffelin (2007: 143) observes, based on her ethnographic work in Bosavi, the “similarities and differences between these two practices—thinking about others’ internal states and/or talking about them—are often at the heart of culture.” When I compare texts originating in a culture in which people think but do not talk publicly about others’ internal states, to those originating in cultures in which people both think and talk about them, indeed, in which public speculation about other people’s intentions is (mostly) rewarded, I am struck by the apparent mind-reading opportunism of literature, that is, by its drive to claim “real” minds as its objects. (This opportunistic endeavor is particularly poignant because our minds are not containers full of representations, that is, we do not walk around with mental states ready to be read: to proclaim a listener’s sorrow to the world, a Gisalo song first has to plunge her into sorrow, which is to say, to *construct* that particular mental state for her.) But this is clearly just the tip of the iceberg. The field of cognitive approaches to comparative literature, sensitive to local ideologies of mind, still awaits its practitioners.

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